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McAuliffe, Mary; Gillis, Liz; Ní Chléirigh, Éadaoin; Almqvist, Marja

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## Forgetting and Remembering - Uncovering Women's Histories at Richmond Barracks: A Public History Project

**Mary McAuliffe**

UCD Women's Studies, School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice  
University College Dublin, Ireland

**Liz Gillis**

Researcher, RTE Archives  
Dublin, Ireland

**Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh**

Director, Richmond Barracks  
Dublin, Ireland

**Marja Almqvist**

The Yarn School, Goldenbridge  
Dublin, Ireland

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### Abstract

*Richmond Barracks was, in 2015, designated one of the seven major restoration and/or commemorative projects to be funded by the Irish State. The Barracks, with its fascinating yet little remembered military, social and political history, was to be, in 2016, centre stage in the centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising. One major aspect of the 1916 'hidden history' of the Barracks was the arrest and imprisonment of seventy seven female insurgents immediately after the surrender. Using these seventy seven women as a lens to understand the lives, activism, motivations and contributions of women to the 1916 Rising, a project of remembering, which combined historical and creative elements, was undertaken. In this article the impact of the project on the commemoration of women in 2016 and how their legacies were interpreted through historical research in a landmark publication, *We were There: 77 women of the Easter Rising* and by contemporary women activists through the *Quilt* project is detailed.*

*Keywords: Ireland--History--Easter Rising, 1916; Feminism; Socialism; Commemoration; Memory.*

### Richmond Barracks: A Commemoration Project

Richmond Barracks, Dublin, was built between 1810-1814, as a response by the British Government to the threat of a Napoleonic invasion of Britain through Ireland, as well as a

response to the ever present internal threat of rebellion in Ireland. For the next one hundred and twenty years the Barracks would serve as a British military barracks, housing many Irish and British battalions who left for colonial wars such the Crimean War (1853-1856), and the Boer War in 1899. From 1914 and the outbreak of war, it served as a depot from which many of the Irish regiments of the British Army left for the Front. In 1916 the Barracks were chosen as a site to hold the thousands of men and women arrested in the aftermath of the Easter Rising 1916. It is also in the Barracks that the courts martial of many of the leaders of 1916 were held and where their death sentences were pronounced. The Barracks remained in the control of the British army until the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, when it was handed over to the army of that State. In 1924, with a severe shortage of public housing looming, the Irish Government decided to use the now renamed Kehoe Barracks for public housing.<sup>1</sup>

Most of Kehoe Square (and the buildings which had formed Richmond Barracks) were taken down in 1970 to make way for the building of St Michael's Estate.<sup>2</sup> Only three buildings which had been purchased by the Christian Brothers in the 1920s and turned into a school remained of the original Barracks. Much of the contribution of Richmond Barracks to the revolutionary history of the 1916 period had been forgotten, certainly in the mainstream narrative of the period. However a small but active local community group were anxious and active in attempting to rescue and commemorate the story of the Barracks. This campaign bore fruit in 2015 when the remaining buildings at the Barracks were elevated to one of Ireland's permanent commemorative 2016 projects. With this decision, a neglected piece of Ireland's national story would now be told. The Easter Rising of 1916 was the most important event in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish history. It was an abortive attempt to secure Irish freedom from Britain, and although confined mostly to Dublin, lasting only a week and ultimately a military failure, the Rising served to change the course of Irish history.

The mass arrests which followed the Rising as well as the execution of sixteen men (the signatories of the Proclamation of 1916 and other leaders) served to transform Ireland from a country where the majority supported constitutional nationalism and the campaign for Home Rule, into a country where militant nationalism was in the ascendant. To commemorate the centenary of 1916, the Irish Government put together a programme which included a €22 million capital programme from the Department for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Seven restoration or commemorative projects were funded, including Richmond Barracks, a planned

€3.5 million restoration works, which [were] developed in collaboration with Dublin City Council, St. Michael's Estate Regeneration Board, the Inchicore-Kilmainham Heritage Group and other stakeholders, [which would allow] the barracks to become a cultural, education, and heritage facility.<sup>3</sup>

These State funds were released to restore and adapt the remaining Barracks buildings and to research the history so as to tell its military, social and political histories. The locally based Inchicore-Kilmainham Heritage Group had long maintained the significance of the site at Richmond Barracks to the story of Ireland's Revolution. They described the imprisonment of the rebels immediately after the Rising in the barracks and the courts martial of the leaders of the 1916 Rising at Richmond Barracks as "The Lost Chapter of 1916":

<sup>1</sup> Liam O'Meara, *From Richmond Barracks to Keogh Square* (Dublin: Riposte Publications, 2014), 332–52.

<sup>2</sup> Liam O'Meara, *From Richmond Barracks to Keogh Square* (Dublin: Riposte Publications, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht at the announcement of the Richmond Barracks development fund, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014. <http://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/2-October-2014-Minister-Humphries-Announces-Plans-for-Renovation-of-Richmond-Barracks>

If the saga of Easter Week is seen as a drama – the first act of which is centred on the GPO and the last act the executions in Kilmainham Gaol, then the penultimate act was played out in Richmond Barracks<sup>4</sup>

## The Lost Chapter of 1916

The GPO, Kilmainham Gaol and Arbour Hill are regarded as iconic sites in the 1916 narrative. The GPO (the General Post Office on Sackville Street, now O'Connell Street) served as the general headquarters (GHQ) for the insurgents, where the leaders of 1916 were stationed and which was destroyed during the week. It was from here that the GHQ garrison left on Easter Friday 1916 as it burned around them. Soon after, on nearby Moore Street, their commander, Patrick Pearse, offered the surrender of all the insurgents to the British authorities. For many decades the commemorations of 1916 have taken place in front of the GPO. Indeed, the new interpretative centre at the GPO was another of the 2016 major capital programmes, as was a major restoration of Kilmainham Gaol and Courthouse. Many of the leaders of 1916 were imprisoned in Kilmainham subsequent to their time in Richmond Barracks, and it is here that fourteen of the sixteen condemned men were executed, between May 3rd and May 12th 1916. The men were then buried in Arbour Hill. These sites have, since 1916, been central to the Easter Rising story and to the yearly commemorations. Indeed, Kilmainham Gaol, abandoned in 1924, was restored around 1960 when a group of 1916 veterans came together to preserve the building as a memorial to the dead of 1916. In 1966, in time for the 50th anniversary of the Rising, a new museum was opened in the East Wing by the then President of Ireland, Éamon deValera, himself a veteran of 1916. In the 1980s Kilmainham was transferred to state care and since then the site has been further restored, the museum upgraded; it is now one of the top visitor attractions in Dublin. In contrast, Richmond Barracks, and its role in the Rising, has remained on the periphery of the story of 1916. The Richmond Barracks Project aimed to provide a corrective to this.

As the Easter Rising came to an end on Easter Saturday 1916 the British authorities had to decide what to do with the hundreds of insurgents who had surrendered. In the following days they would also begin the process of rounding up thousands of more suspects, especially men and women who were known to be members of the armed nationalist militias, the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army and the militant women's nationalist organisation, Cumann na mBan. In time, over 3,000 people implicated in the 1916 Rising and in other so-called 'seditious' actions were detained there; 77 of them were women, rounded up from all parts of Ireland. As Ó Broin noted

Following the surrender, the British military moved swiftly to deal with the situation. First of all they selected Richmond Barracks as a 'holding centre', they also decided that the leaders of the Rising and other officers would be held at Richmond Barracks for trial.<sup>5</sup>

Richmond Barracks was considered suitable as it was close to Dublin's city centre and, with its open squares and parade grounds, was the most convenient location to process and sort those involved. It was here that the leaders of the Rising were identified, separated from the others, and placed in the Barracks' gymnasium, a large imposing hall, flanked by two officers' quarters, which still exist today. There in the gym, on rough wooden floors, they bedded down awaiting summary justice. As O'Meara has noted, the majority of those arrested after the Rising were released, whereas 1,841 were sent to internment camps in England. Those thought to have organised the Rising were held back in Ireland, at Richmond Barracks, awaiting trial. Ultimately,

<sup>4</sup> Seosamh O Broin, *Inchicore, Kilmainham and District* (Dublin: Cois Camoige Publications, 1999), 186.

<sup>5</sup> Liam O'Meara, *From Richmond Barracks to Keogh Square*, 2014, 8.

in 90 of these cases the sentence was death by being shot. General Maxwell, the British military governor appointed to restore order after the Rising, confirmed the sentence of death for each of the 15 of these who were executed between the 3rd and 12th of May 1916.<sup>6</sup>

The subsequent history of Richmond Barracks, not in the abandoned and semi-ruined state as at Kilmainham Gaol, but as Kehoe Square and as a Christian Brothers school, served to merge the 1916 history of the barracks, and its previous incarnation as a British military barracks. As Kehoe Square, the space became infamous in the narrative of the failures of national, and more locally, Dublin social housing, a by-word for bad conditions and deprivation. Unlike Kilmainham Gaol, Richmond Barracks was, in the 1970s, mostly taken down to make way for the building of St Michael's Estate. The three buildings which remain today were retained for educational purposes, as a Christian Brothers' School to serve the local community. The same gymnasium where the Rising leaders were once held was described in a past pupil's memoir, recounting a different use in 1940, although perhaps not much unlike the holding centre:

The Gym was used to distribute milk at lunch time....We stood in the Gym in serried ranks. Woes betide anyone who spoke or stepped out of line, or, sin of all sins dropped a sandwich. The sound of the leather striking a boy's hand reverberated round the barn of a Gym....I don't think any of us had any idea of the part the Gym played in the 1916 Uprising.<sup>7</sup>

The full 200 year history of this site is fascinating; it is rare indeed to find one site which encapsulates so much of the military, social, political and revolutionary history of a colony and a subsequent independent state. Not alone does the site tell something of the British colonial era and the struggle for independence, it also speaks to the history of working class Dublin families – the people who lived and worked for Ireland.

## The 77 Women of Richmond Barracks

Of the thousands of people held in Richmond Barracks after the 1916 Rising, seventy seven were women. Most of these women were members of the all-female militant nationalist organisation, Cumann na mBan (the Women's Council) or the mixed gender socialist militia, the Irish Citizen Army (ICA). A strong motivation within the Richmond Barracks project and the local community was to research and recover the history of these seventy seven women of the 1916 Rising. A committee of historians, a political scientist, an artist and community members developed this ambitious vision for this recovery. The endeavour to unearth the histories of these rebel Irish women included archival and oral history research, and was supplemented with artistic and dramatic forms, but the vision that underpinned it all was clear in its intent:

By illuminating the lives, the work and the activism of the 77 women of Richmond Barracks in their struggle for independence and full and equal citizenship, women of our generation, in all walks of life, will be inspired to reclaim this extraordinary heritage.<sup>8</sup>

The vision also acknowledged that the lives, activism and contribution of women during and after this revolutionary period had been largely neglected in the various traditional narratives of the revolutionary period (1912-1923) and in the founding story of the Irish State. It was intended that the work on the Richmond Project would contribute by broadening the histories of the revolutionary period and return these women to their rightful place in Irish history.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Corbett, *a Dublin Odyssey* (Ely, Cambridgeshire: Melrose Books, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> "Richmond Barracks Commemoration Committee Guidelines, 2013-2016," n.d.

Recovering the histories of the lives, contributions and activism of these seventy seven women provided the opportunity to recover a detailed, forensic snapshot of female activism and participation in the Rising and in the subsequent War of Independence (1919-1921) and Civil War (1922-1923). The biggest female militant nationalist organisation was Cumann na mBan, founded in 1914 at a meeting held in Wynn's Hotel, Dublin. Earlier, in November 1913, the Irish Volunteers (the male nationalist organisation) had held their inaugural meeting. At this meeting women were not given any particular role, but many of the Volunteer leaders agreed that there would be work for women to do. However, in response to queries from them on their role, Irish Volunteer leader Padraig Pearse rather evasively responded that 'while the women would have ambulance and red cross work to do and that a women's rifle club was desirable, he 'would not like the idea of women drilling and marching in the ordinary way, but there is no reason why they should not learn how to shoot'.<sup>9</sup> The contradictions in this statement are symptomatic of the difficulties that the men had in envisioning the sort of work nationalist women would do, and how to incorporate that work within the Irish Volunteers.

The women who were asking the questions of the Irish Volunteer leadership were women who had been activists for many years. Women like Jennie Wyse Power, a nationalist and suffragist, who had been a fervent campaigner since her teenage years; she was a co-founder of the cultural-nationalist group Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland) and involved with the political organisation Sinn Féin (Ourselves Alone) from the beginning as well as being a member of several suffrage organisations. In the later memoir on the founding of Cumann na mBan, *Leabhair na mBan* (1919) Wyse Power remembered that Cumann na mBan came from the 'many information meetings which took place – in the months after the formation of the Volunteers 'to discuss the formation of a women's society whose aim would be to work independently, and at the same time to organise nationalist women to be of service to the Irish Volunteers'.<sup>10</sup> A meeting was called, for all interested women to gather at 4pm on Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1914 in Wynn's Hotel. The women adopted a constitution which stated that the aims of Cumann na mBan were to (1) Advance the cause of Irish liberty, (2) To organise Irish women in the furtherance of that objective (3) to assist in arming and equipping a body of Irish men for the defence of Ireland (4) To form a fund for these purposes to be called the 'Defence of Ireland Fund and (5) To engage in training activists in first aid, drill and signalling, and rifle practice. From April 1914 Cumann na mBan developed their membership. By October 1914 there were over 60 branches countrywide, some of which had over 100 members.

One of the first branches of Cumann na mBan came from among the members of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann which contained many women who had been involved in nationalist and feminist activism for at least the previous decade. At that first meeting of this Inghinidhe branch of Cumann na mBan, about thirty members enrolled, and with this merger 'there was no doubt that it (Cumann na mBan) became more culturally directed and that the intellectual heart of the new organisation also came under the influence of some more advanced [female] 'militant republicans'.<sup>11</sup> Set up in 1900 to provide a platform for women engaged with nationalist ideals, but who were not allowed join male organisations, Inghinidhe na hÉireann was dedicated to the complete independence of Ireland. Historians of Irish women's involvement in politics in modern Ireland argue that Inghinidhe was one of the most

<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 113.

<sup>10</sup> Cumann na mBan, *Leabhair Na mBan* (Dublin: Cumann na mBan, 1919), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Cal McCarthy, *Cumann Na mBan and the Irish Revolution* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2014), 26–27.

important political organizations founded in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. From 1907 onwards, under the stewardship of its secretary, (and later 1916 insurgent) Helena Molony, Inghinidhe moved in a more radical direction emphasising their ideals of advanced nationalism, feminism and socialism, and, in 1908, the group launched the first nationalist/feminist newspaper *Bean na h-Éireann*; the masthead of which proclaimed its support for ‘complete separatism, the rising cause of feminism and the interest of Irishwomen generally’.<sup>12</sup>

In her “Labour Notes” column in *Bean na h-Éireann*, Molony wrote that she had ‘fumb[le]d at the idea of a junction between labour and nationalism’ and had come to the conclusion that ‘Labour and the Nation [are] really one’.<sup>13</sup> She was not the only one of the advanced feminist nationalist women who were leaning towards socialism at this time. Many of the other seventy seven women were also engaged in trade union activities and the campaigns for the rights of workers, particularly the women workers prior to 1916. The Irish Women Workers’ Union (IWWU) was founded in 1911 under the stewardship of trade union activist Delia Larkin and supported by feminist activist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, and Inghinidhe na h-Éireann members Helena Molony and her fellow 1916 insurgent, Countess Markievicz. The Dublin Lockout of 1913 would prove the first real test of the IWWU, as well as for the female activists now engaged within two or indeed all three movements of feminism, socialism and nationalism.

Hundreds of female workers (out of a total of more than 15,000 workers in all) were locked out by the Dublin employers in an attempt to break the male and female unions. Working class women like Rosie Hackett, Jinny Shanahan, Brigid Davis (all later 1916 insurgents), now members of the IWWU, joined their male comrades in demanding the right to unionise and were locked-out for their troubles. Several of IWWU members were strikers themselves, and the trade union headquarters, Liberty Hall, was where women from all organisations came together to provide support for the striking workers.<sup>14</sup> In late 1913 union leader James Connolly announced the formation of a workers militia, the Irish Citizens Army, effectively a defence corps for the workers.<sup>15</sup> Women were involved in the ICA from the beginning, with many of the more socialist female activists preferring to join the ICA rather than any other militant nationalist organisation, as it accepted men and women members on an equal basis. Among the advanced nationalist women who were members of the ICA were Countess Markievicz, Helena Molony, Madeleine French-Mullen, Marie Perolz, Nellie Gifford and Kathleen Lynn. Alongside these upper and middle class women the other female activists in Liberty Hall were working class women. As well as joining the IWWU and participating in the Lockout, working women such as Margaret Joyce, Brigid Goff, Bridget Brady, Martha Kelly, as well as Hackett, Shanahan, Davis and others, joined the women’s section of the ICA in 1913 and 1914.

With the formation of Cumann na mBan in 1914 there were now two female organisations, one nationalist (Cumann na mBan) and one socialist (Irish Citizen Army) which provided a platform from which women engaged in nationalism, feminism and socialism could organise. It is from these two organisations that the majority of the seventy seven women of 1916 came. In the weeks and months preceding the Rising the women of

<sup>12</sup> Karen Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics during the Irish Revival* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 109. In 1913, in the suffrage newspaper, the Irish Citizen, it was a *Bean na h-Éireann* contributor and later 1916 rebel, Countess Markievicz who identified these three movements of Ireland as the nationalist, women’s and labour movements.

<sup>13</sup> Fearghal McGarry, “Helena Molony: A Revolutionary Life,” *History Ireland* 21, no. 4 (August 2013): 38–41.

<sup>14</sup> Senia Paseta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 125.

<sup>15</sup> Ann Matthews, *The Irish Citizen Army* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2014), 18–23.

both organisations were receiving training in first aid, rifle practice, signalling, drilling and route marching. Once the Rising was underway the women of the ICA fought mainly in two outposts, at City Hall and at St Stephens Greens/Royal College of Surgeons. Among the women of the ICA who were subsequently arrested were middle class radical women such as Nellie Gifford, Madeline ffrench-Mullen, Dr Kathleen Lynn, Helena Molony, Marie Perloz and Countess Markievicz who represented the cohort of older, educated, politicised women who, by 1916, had been active in feminist, socialist and nationalist politics for at least a decade. Because of their activism these women knew each other and moved in the same circles. Lynn met Molony through her friendship with Markievicz and, as Lynn herself stated, Molony ‘converted [her] to the National movement’.<sup>16</sup> In 1913 Lynn joined Markievicz, Molony and other activists in the soup kitchens in Liberty Hall and it was here that she met her life-long partner, Madeleine ffrench-Mullen. Along with Markievicz and Molony, they both joined the ICA at its formation and Lynn became its chief medical officer, while Molony was ‘in actual charge of the girls on the military side’.<sup>17</sup>

The remaining ICA women arrested in 1916 were younger, working class women, politicised later than the older women, many directly through support of and/or membership of the trade union movement. ICA members Rosie Hackett, Bessie Lynch, Jinny Shanahan, Bridget Davis, Brigid Goff, Margaret Joyce and the Norgrove sisters (Annie and Emily) were involved in trade union activities from 1911, joining the IWWU and were locked out of their jobs in 1913. This group was among the early members of the women’s section of the ICA. As well as trade union activism some of these women were involved in cultural nationalism. While military ranks among the women in the Citizen Army were vague and unclear, Molony mentioned that Shanahan and Katie Barrett were ‘sort of ranked as sergeants’ under her in the women’s section.<sup>18</sup> Hackett, Shanahan, Davis, Lynch, Maggie Joyce, Bridget Goff, the Norgroves and Barrett all volunteered in the soup kitchen at Liberty Hall during the Lockout, where they met many of the older and more experienced, feminist/nationalist activists.<sup>19</sup> Most of them had joined the women’s section of the Citizen Army by 1915 and were all involved in the preparations for the Rising in Liberty Hall in the weeks and months prior to Easter Monday, 1916.

The majority of the Cumann na mBan women arrested came from the militant and well organised Inghinidhe branch, most of whom had mobilised and served together, with their O/C Rose McNamara, at the Marrowbone Lane garrison, commanded by Irish Volunteer leader, Éamonn Ceannt.<sup>20</sup> McNamara, the daughter of a shopkeeper, was born in Dublin and was an early member of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, joining in 1906, then following that organisation into Cumann na mBan in 1914. Other members of the Inghinidhe branch included May Gahan, Julia Grenan, Margaret Kennedy, Bridget Hegarty, the Cooney sisters (Lily, Eileen and Annie) Rose Mullally, Sheila O’Hanlon, Josie O’Keefe, the Quigley sisters (Maria and Priscilla), Marcella Cosgrove and Josephine Spicer. All of these women were

<sup>16</sup> Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, BMH WS 357 (Kathleen Lynn), 1, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0357.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Military Service Pension Applications/Military Archives of Ireland – IE/MA, MSP34REF11739 (Helena Molony), <http://mspcsearch.militaryarchives.ie/detail.aspx?parentpreref=>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See Military Pension applications made by Hackett, Shanahan, Davis, Lynch, Goff, the Norgroves and Barrett for information on when they considered they began their association with the Irish Citizen Army.

Bureau of Military History, “Bureau of Military History, Witness Statements: Search,” June 13, 2016, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/bmhsearch/search.jsp>.

<sup>20</sup> The majority of Cumann na mBan women who were out in Dublin in 1916 came from the Central branch but they served mainly in the GPO and the Four Courts areas, where they either obeyed the order to leave before surrender or they managed to evade capture after surrender.



from working class backgrounds, many of them living in the tenements and artisan dwellings in inner city Dublin, some in the area around Richmond Barracks. Although McNamara, Grenan, and Cosgrove were long time members of the original Inghinidhe na hÉireann, most other members who fought in 1916 joined the Inghinidhe branch after 1914 when it had become part of Cumann na mBan. Many of these younger women date their interest in Cumann na mBan and nationalism from the public funeral of the old Fenian, The O'Donovan Rossa (August 1915) which heightened interest in advanced nationalism among a young generation of women and men, especially those women who would have witnessed Cumann na mBan marching in uniform in the funeral precession.

The other branches of Cumann na mBan which provided women who fought in 1916 were the Central branch, the Fairview branch and the Colmcille branch. Most of the women in these branches had been in Cumann na mBan from the beginning and some, like Pauline Markham, had been present in the funeral procession of O'Donovan Rossa. For example, in 1914, Nora O'Daly was a founding member of the Fairview branch of Cumann na mBan. Like most other Cumann na mBan branches, the Fairview women attended first aid classes and also learned rifle cleaning and sighting, drill and others things which 'might prove useful in assisting the men of the 2nd Battalion (Irish Volunteers)' to which the Fairview Cumann was attached. O'Daly was involved in hiding arms brought in during the 1914 Howth gun running and also handed out anti-recruitment leaflets during 1915. All of these activities continued until Easter 1916, when ideologically driven, and trained for participation, over 300 women answered the call to fight for Irish freedom.

## In Richmond Barracks after the surrender, 1916

On Saturday April 29<sup>th</sup> 1916 the order to surrender, carried by Cumann na mBan member Elizabeth O'Farrell, came to the various insurgent outposts. Most commandants at outposts had already instructed the women of Cumann na mBan and the IC to leave and evade arrest. However, at Marrowbone Lane, Rose McNamara and her contingent of the Inghinidhe branch insisted on surrendering with the men. An account of the surrender describes how the women 'could have evaded arrest but they marched down four deep in uniform along with the men'<sup>21</sup>. McNamara explained to the British officer in charge that the women 'were part of the rebel contingent and were surrendering with the rest'.<sup>22</sup> They marched in formation (and singing rebel songs) towards Richmond Barracks:

between two lines of our brave men. We waited until all the arms were taken away. The men gave each of us their small arms to do as we liked with, thinking we were going to go home, but we were not going to leave the men we were with all the week to their fate; we decided to go along with them and be with them to the end whatever our fate might be. Some of the girls had as many as three revolvers; some had more.<sup>23</sup>

When they arrived at the barracks, the women were 'separated from the men and led away to the far side...for the night where we got tea, etc.'<sup>24</sup> Annie Cooney remembered her night in the Barracks with clarity:

We marched right into the big square, where we were halted. There we were separated from the men who were put into a separate building. We were all - 22 of us - brought into a large building up the stairs and we were first put into a rather small room, where we were divided

<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Military History, "Document No. W.S. 482," 1951, 8, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0482.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Clonan, "The Forgotten Role of Women Insurgents in the 1916 Rising," 2006, 154, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/the-forgotten-role-of-women-insurgents-in-the-1916-rising-1.1030426>.

<sup>23</sup> Bureau of Military History, "Document No. W.S. 482," 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

up for the night, eleven of us in each of two rooms. A British military sergeant had charge of us and brought us tea in a bucket and some hard biscuits which we called dog biscuits. We ate and drank, what we got, as we were hungry. The sergeant apologised for the sort of food he had to give us.<sup>25</sup>

The women were actually housed in the married quarters in the barracks before they were transferred to Kilmainham Gaol early the next day, 1 May. As Richmond Barracks served as a sorting centre they did not remain there very long. Pauline Morkan, a member of the Central Branch, Cumann na mBan, mentioned that they were well treated in Richmond initially; ‘some of the soldiers gave us a few army biscuits which we thought were awful. They all behaved very nicely to us’.<sup>26</sup> Up in the married quarters, McNamara and her ‘girls’ were also worried about the fact that they still had the guns they had taken from their male comrades at Marrowbone Lane and had brought with them to Richmond Barracks. Fearing they would be searched they managed to secrete them up the fireplace in the room in which they were locked.

Later that day women from the other outposts began to arrive, including Dr Kathleen Lynn and the ICA women who had fought in City Hall and those who had served in the Four Courts and Church Street area. The women and men from the GPO garrison, who had spent Saturday night under arrest in front of the Rotunda Hospital

where [they] were all commanded to get on to the grass. [They] were placed under armed guard, and remained there - men and women — higgledy—piggledy, all night’ were also brought in.<sup>27</sup>

ICA member Rosie Hackett wrote of the hostile crowd the insurgent garrison from the Royal College of Surgeons had marched through en route to Richmond Barracks via Dublin Castle. Through the shouts and jeers of the crowd, her comrade William Partridge kept telling them to keep their heads erect.<sup>28</sup> By the time Brigid Lyons (Thornton) reached Richmond Barracks, having spent a night under arrest in the Four Courts, eating crackers and chocolate and sleeping ‘in the judges’ ermine’, the treatment of women detained there had deteriorated.<sup>29</sup> She was ‘thrown’ into a room with the ‘two Sullivan girls...Flossie Mead and Carrie Mitchell...Winnie Carney’, while the ‘sentries outside threw us a few dog biscuits through the fanlight’.<sup>30</sup>

As the prisoners arrived at the barracks they came under scrutiny from the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) and the British troops. The G-men from the DMP began to sort them; those they considered the leaders who would be subject to court-martial, those who should be kept in prison and those who should be deported or released. Many of the women who arrived on the first and second day after surrender were interviewed one by one. Later, about 7 p.m. on the second evening, they were taken to the Barracks square where they met Countess Markievicz and some of the other women. They were then lined up, and looking very bedraggled, marched off to Kilmainham Gaol with the ‘crowds outside along the route

<sup>25</sup> Bureau of Military History, “Document No. W.S. 805,” 1953, 10–11, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0805.pdf#page=1>.

<sup>26</sup> Bureau of Military History, “Document No. W.S. 432,” 1950, 5, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0432.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Bureau of Military History, “Document No. W.S. 370,” 1950, 11, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0370.pdf#page=1>.

<sup>28</sup> Bureau of Military History, “Document No. W.S. 546,” 1951, 9, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0546.pdf#page=1>.

<sup>29</sup> Bureau of Military History, “Document No. S.W. 259,” 1949, 7, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0259.pdf#page=1>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

[giving them] a mixed reception, cheering, jeering, booing (*sic*) and making remarks, mostly uncomplimentary'.<sup>31</sup> Pauline Morkan also mentioned this hostile crowd and how Markievicz told the women to “keep your heads up, girls” and a few other phrases like that’ as they marched from Richmond Barracks to Kilmainham Gaol.<sup>32</sup> While the women spent less than twenty four hours in Richmond Barracks the experience was indelibly imprinted on the memories. For many it was the first time they were arrested, for others it was the last time they saw many of their male comrades and leaders. For most the experience solidified the sense of comradeship and determination to continue the fight which would see them through the War of Independence. Recognising the experience in Richmond Barracks as important allows us to understand the multi-layered impact of violent revolution and its aftermath on these women’s lives.

## Commemoration, History and Creative Practice: Richmond Barracks Quilt Project

The historical research carried out to uncover the story of the seventy seven Richmond Barracks women resulted in the production of a book, which placed the women and their contributions in their socio-political and historical contexts.<sup>33</sup> However, it was always intended that the Richmond Barracks project would be multi-faceted. Reflecting its own history as both part of the revolutionary period in Ireland and part of working class histories of Dublin, a creative project was envisioned that would reflect these complex pasts and the communities in which they occurred. The creative project emerged from the artistic practice of Marja Almqvist, working from a community-based textile studio, The Yarn School, which is located near the former Barracks site in Goldenbridge. It was inspired by the historical research on the seventy seven women by historians Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis. Calling this project the *Commemorative Quilt* was partially subversive. Women’s creativity has been historically confined, by and large, to work in the domestic sphere; thus the *Commemorative Quilt* project acts as a commentary on the expectation that the work of women’s hands is associated with the beautification and comfort of home. The idea of making a Quilt to commemorate the women of 1916 might at first appear to conform, or reinforce this view and thus presents itself as a project within the bounds of familiar social norms vis-à-vis conventional gender roles. At the same time, the making of a quilt is very consciously a commentary on the domestic role assigned to women in the post-revolutionary period. And yet, the project does not follow a familiar pattern of women’s collective textile work, where an artist makes a design that is executed by a group of needle-women. In this case the seventy seven participants were not asked to be artisans; rather they were invited to collaborate as artists, researchers and critical thinkers.

Each of the participants of the commemorative Quilt Project was randomly assigned to one of the seventy seven women of 1916 that are associated with Richmond Barracks. The quilt contributors were provided with biographical material from the aforementioned historical research, and were armed with some pointers as to how to search for further information in various archives and libraries. During the autumn of 2015 the volunteers attended a series of workshops where, in smaller groups, they came together to share their findings and reflections. By January 2016, each woman had a design concept for her panel. The seventy seven panels were then developed and made in The Yarn School. An integral

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bureau of Military History, “Document No. W.S. 432,” 5.

<sup>33</sup> Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis, *Richmond Barracks 1916: “We Were There” – 77 Women of the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016).

part of the Quilt Project was that each one of the seventy seven women who participated came up with a concept for her own panel in honour of one of the seventy seven women of Richmond Barracks. This process provided ample opportunity to reflect on how each participant related to historical narratives of the Rising, while also responding to these with her own interpretation of a particular woman's life. This process naturally related to each participant's individual circumstances but it was also apparent that certain common themes began to emerge. As these were discussed among the participants in the design workshops it became evident that the group collectively held the view that women's multiple roles prior to, during and after the events of 1916 have up to now been underestimated and undervalued. A collective shared sense of feminist identity emerged, through which it was recognised that a revolutionary movement that set out through its Proclamation<sup>34</sup> to value all Irish men and Irish women equally ended up in the 1937 Constitution limiting women's collective role to the domestic sphere:

In particular, the state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.<sup>35</sup>

Observing this process it appeared evident that 'commemoration' was equally a means of exploring the idea of identity in general and feminist identity in particular. The issue of comparing the life circumstances and ideals of the women of 1916 to that of women today came up again and again, leading to the question; 'What does being 'an Irish woman' mean for me today?' Feminist identity politics has been critiqued for ignoring the diversity of women's experience and the cumulative effect of the intersectional oppressions of race and class, as well as gender.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, as Handler points out the idea of 'identity', either individual or collective, as something that is static and reified ignores the relational and fluid character of identity formation:

In current scholarly analysis of collective identities, there is a tension between the notion that identity is essential, fundamental, unitary and unchanging, and the notion that identities are constructed and reconstructed through historical action.<sup>37</sup>

He goes on to argue that the ongoing process of construction and negotiation of identity narratives are frequently used negatively for the development of story-lines that legitimize power and repression of one group over another.

It has been widely recognised that women's involvement in the Rising has been largely excluded from earlier commemorations. In particular, during the 50th anniversary of the Rising in 1966 the contribution of women was rarely mentioned. It can be argued that this has mirrored Irish women's struggle over the past 100 years to gain recognition and equality in most spheres of Irish life, including in the history books. The corrective of the last four decades by historians of women who have been researching and writing about the women's role in the Rising has helped to force inclusion of women in the 2016 commemoration. The Richmond Barracks '77 women' research project, the book and Legacy Quilt Project set out

<sup>34</sup> The 1916 Proclamation states that 'The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal right and equal opportunities for all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided minority from the majority in the past.'

<sup>35</sup> Ireland, *Bunreacht Na hÉireann = Constitution of Ireland*. (Dublin: Government Publications Sale Office, 1942), Article 41.2.1.

<sup>36</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 2006): 193–209, doi:10.1177/1350506806065752.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Handler, Is 'Identity a useful cross-cultural concept?' in John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 2.

in a very deliberate fashion to expand this narrative, and not only to include women, but to put them centre stage. In so doing, through this project, we are contributing to the feminist argument spearheaded by scholars such as Benhabib (1996), Fraser (2004), Franke (2006) and many others, that the formation and maintenance of a collective feminist identity is necessary for women to gain real equality in the wake of revolutionary movements.

The idea behind pairing each one of the seventy seven with one 2016 woman was to remove the individual woman from an idealised version of the story of ‘the women of 1916’, and to reclaim her right to have her individual story heard. In that process certain themes which had concerned the women of 1916 and which continue to resonate with women today emerged in the workshops. These include lack of adequate public housing, issues around reproductive rights and access to public health, equal pay, glass ceilings in certain professions, low levels of women’s political participation, access to education and the perception of women as primary carers and home-makers. Through a collective process of discovery the women who were involved in the project gained a deeper insight as to how their own identity as women has been shaped by historical forces. Again and again participants expressed their amazement at their own ignorance and neglect of women’s history. The feeling that they had been deprived of role models of women as active, political citizens and agents for change was a reoccurring theme and reclaiming these women as the trailblazers they were has been an important outcome of the project for the participants.

Although the Quilt was grounded in historical research, it was primarily a creative exercise in re-imagining story and vision. While the lives of some of the 1916 Easter Rising leaders are remembered, the majority of the women with one or two exceptions, particularly the working class women have been thoroughly eradicated from our collective memories. The women who endured poverty, multiple pregnancies and high rates of infant mortality, unemployment, disease – how should we commemorate them? Through the panels of women such as Martha Kelly, Bridget Murtagh, Kate Kelly, May O’Moore and many of the other women remembered in the Quilt, this particular commemorative project is attempting to bring their stories alive for the public’s imagination today. The promise of equal citizenship for women had formed part of the 1916 Proclamation, and also formed part of the 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State, which stated that ‘every person *without distinction of sex...* [shall] enjoy the privileges and be subject to the obligations of such citizenship’. However, the reality of women’s participation in the political and public life of the newly formed Irish Free State was soon undermined by the legislative, cultural and social ideals of ‘respectability’ and domesticity.

Between 1922 and 1936 Ireland’s governments introduced legislation to consistently chip away at the equal position of women; during this period women lost the right to work and to protection for female workers, to information on contraceptives, to sit on juries. The right to be a full citizen was denied to women. The fight back over the new 1937 constitution was emblematic of the anger felt by Irish women activists. Senator Kathleen Clarke — widow of Thomas Clarke, one of the signatories to the Proclamation — issued a fiery denunciation of the new constitution, citing its regulation of the rights of women workers and its relegation of women to the domestic realm (Articles 40.1 and 40.2). Article 41 of the constitution stated that the state shall ‘endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home’.<sup>38</sup> Clark declared the document a betrayal of the promises of the 1916 Proclamation and principles of

<sup>38</sup> Ireland, *Bunreacht Na hÉireann = Constitution of Ireland*.

equality contained therein.<sup>39</sup> Women today have been given very little opportunity to come together to acknowledge the debt owed to the imaginations and dreams of their fore-mothers. Through women's imaginations and commemorative projects such as the quilt, the hope is to become part of shaping a more equal future for all of Ireland's daughters and sons, regardless of gender, sexuality, or class.

## Conclusion

The multifaceted project of remembering and commemorating the seventy seven women of Richmond Barracks has grabbed the attention of the Irish public. These seventy seven women arrested after the Rising and the other 200 plus women who participated, have been included in most of the state, local and creative commemorations which have occurred in 2016. For the Richmond Barracks commemorative sub-committee on the seventy seven women, it was important to have rigorous historical research completed on the women's lives and activism and to situate any commemoration in both the historical and the contemporary. Analysis of the historical research demonstrated that the women were mainly from working class backgrounds, from the north and south inner city, many of them from the tenements of Dublin. Their politicisation and activism was informed by trade unions and workers' rights as much as by feminism and nationalism. The communities they were from continue, for the most part, to be working class districts and some of these areas still suffer from real social deprivation. While the histories and contributions of the seventy seven women were re-constructed; aiding in broadening the narrative of revolutionary Ireland; questions about the memory and legacies of these women were looked at in a creative way.

Most of the women who took part in the Quilt Project came from the same areas as the women of 1916, or were themselves campaigners for women rights and social justice in contemporary Irish society. To these women who participated in the Quilt Project, the legacies of what the Richmond Barracks 77 were fighting for in 1916 are issues that still need to be campaigned for in 2016, and thus this story seems to remain real and immediate. The Quilt Project participants also questioned the betrayal of the promises which the Rising, and most especially the promise of equality contained in the Proclamation of 1916, should have bestowed. In spite of their contributions to a fight for independence and citizen's rights, the women of 1916 soon found themselves again relegated to second class citizenship and the domestic sphere in this 'new' Ireland. Combining the historical and the creative in remembering the women of 1916 helped explore the idea that everyone can play a part in making and, indeed, in remaking and recording history. The weaving of the histories and legacies of 1916 into the contemporary concerns of 2016 allowed a conversation to develop between female activists across the divide of 100 years. Both projects, the historical research and the story of the Barracks and the creative artefact that came of the Quilt Project, will be part of the permanent Richmond exhibition, and will situate the site and women's histories, women's activism and women's contributions to the Nation and to their communities, in such a way as to highlight the place of Irish women's stories for the present day.

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<sup>39</sup> See Mary McAuliffe 'The Unquiet Sisters': Women, Politics and the Irish Free State Senate, 1922-1936 in Clara Fischer et al., *Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future : Essays in Honour of Mary Cullen and Margaret Mac Curtain*, 2015, 47-70.

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